



**VOLUME 1**  
**READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS**

**FISHERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**



# Introduction

This is a year-long study of the entire New Testament beyond the four Gospels, which is separately available as a year-long study of the Life of Jesus. After Jesus died and rose, but before He ascended, He gave His followers the Great Commission:

<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Book of Acts is the history of how the early Christians carried out that commission, that is, how they were "on mission." This study examines that historical record, along with the Epistles (letters) and the Book of Revelation that accompany it. When the Book of Acts features a person or place or theme, we will pause to look at those writings. When Peter makes a speech that launches the Christian movement (Week 2), we will explore the books of 1 & 2 Peter (Weeks 3 & 4). When Paul does ministry in Philippi (Week 21), we will pause to study the book of Philippians for the next four days.

Call it a "chrono-geo-bio-logical" flow, following the chronology of Acts, then diverting to the biographical people or geographical places or thematic topics mentioned. Hopefully, this will encourage the person doing the study to more fully engage with the Scripture in its context. There is great value in reading the New Testament books straight through, or in the order in which they were written. This study takes a more thematic approach, reading the epistles of the faces and places encountered in the book of Acts, where possible.

**There are several components to this year-long exploration into Jesus' mission:**

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Daily Poems** – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine the New Testament through poetry.
4. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum and others, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, [visit visithishumc.org/beonmission](http://visithishumc.org/beonmission) for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
6. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week's readings, visit [visithishumc.org/beonmission](http://visithishumc.org/beonmission) for easy access.

As with the "Life of Jesus" study, throughout my devotions for the "Be on Mission" study, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about His relationships (e.g. "Mary's son"). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to "live out" the New Testament way of life. It is my hope that you will "Be on Mission!"

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor

*Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church*

**1/9/2023  
WEEK 1 DAY 1**

**Jesus's  
Resurrection  
Appearances**

**Read Acts 1:1-3**

## Devotional

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he wrote, "Our dear friend Luke, the doctor... send[s] greetings" (Colossians 4:14; see also Philemon 1:24). This Dr. Luke was a historian and traveling companion on Paul's missionary journeys. He decided it was important to write a two-part history of the Christian faith: the Gospel of Luke (a history of Jesus) and the Book of Acts (a history of the early Church).

In these first three verses of Acts, Luke reminds the reader that everything is grounded in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. In fact, this year-long study is based on that truth. It's all about Jesus.

This study will follow the chronology of Luke's Book of Acts. Then, when appropriate, it will delve into the people and places and topics mentioned in Acts to understand them more clearly. For example, when the Book of Acts tells the ministry of Peter, we will pause to read 1 & 2 Peter. And when Acts travels to Ephesus, we will take a detour to read the Book of Ephesians. When Stephen gives a chapter long summary of the Hebrew faith in the Old Testament, we will do a deeper dive by reading the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. By doing so, this study will cover the entire New Testament beyond the four Gospels.

And as you read and reflect, you will discover the same truth that Luke arrived at. It's all about Jesus. Take a moment and compare the verses in today's readings with the first few verses in the Gospel of Luke:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

What was Dr. Luke's goal in writing both Luke and Acts?  
What is your goal as you embark on this year-long journey through the New Testament?

## Poem

All Done and Done, Now Do

*Beloved of God  
We sit and watch  
We hear and learn  
Christ incarnate among us  
He's done and done  
And done still more  
All done and done  
Now do*

*Beloved of God  
We witness pain  
Then empty tomb  
Christ reconciling for us  
He's done and done  
And done still more  
All done and done  
Now do*

*Beloved of God  
A choosing here  
A mission clear  
Christ breathing Holy Spirit  
He's done and done  
And done still more  
All done and done  
Now you*

*Beloved of God  
Christ's kingdom come  
Christ's will be done  
Christ charge commission on us  
He's done and done  
And done still more  
All done and done  
Now you*

1/10/2023  
WEEK 1 DAY 2

Wait For Holy  
Spirit Baptism

Read Acts 1:4-5

## Devotional

Three years earlier, Jesus began His earthly ministry by being baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist. When Jesus emerged from the water, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and a voice boomed from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Then, Jesus went on to have a Spirit empowered ministry filled with miracles and messages from God.

Now, the resurrected Jesus is promising the same to His disciples. They had just witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection. They weren't sure what to do next. So, Jesus gave them one word.

Wait.

Specifically, Jesus said, "wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Sometimes God wants us to take action. Sometimes He wants us to wait.

But this waiting wasn't an excuse for doing nothing. It was waiting with intentionality. It was waiting with purpose. It was waiting with expectation. It was waiting for the Holy Spirit to empower them for action.

Think about it. What are you waiting for from God? As you begin this year, what are you hoping for from the Lord? How will you seek it?

## Poem

Perimeno—To Wait For Acts 1: 4

*There's waiting at the stoplight  
There's waiting for the bus  
We wait in doctor's offices  
We wait while children fuss*

*There's waiting for the phone call  
From blind date overdue  
We wait for diagnoses  
For big deals to come through*

*We wait to have a menstrual flow  
A bullet dodged and missed  
We wait to skip a period  
A baby to exist*

*There's frantic waiting—rescue  
There's weary waiting—death  
There's waiting for what never comes  
There's holding of one's breath*

*We worry in our waiting  
We find some tasks to do  
We fiddle and we agitate  
Might lift a prayer or two*

*But do we wait upon the LORD  
God's Spirit to ignite?  
Or do we wail against the goads  
Engage in tantrum fight?*

*O Spirit, give me patience  
Amidst the waiting games  
As I await your promises  
And all your grace contains*

*Remove my anxious suffering  
And settle me today  
Within your Sabbath resting  
Be this my waiting Way*



**1/11/2023  
WEEK 1 DAY 3**

**You Will Be  
My Witnesses**

**Read Acts 1:6-8**

## Devotional

In yesterday's reading, we saw how Jesus told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. Now He tells them what that will look like: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The promised Holy Spirit would give them power to change the world. How's that for marching orders! The Greek word for power is "dunamis" and is the root word for dynamite. Yes, the Holy Spirit would give them explosive power to impact the world for Jesus!

This single verse is the summary of the entire Book of Acts. In chapters 1-7, the message is spread throughout Jerusalem and Judea. In Acts 8-12, the gospel is taken to Samaria and other regions nearby. And beginning in chapter 13, Paul and others become witnesses to "the ends of the earth." We have a similar call to spread the good news of Jesus today:

Jerusalem – in other words, your own neighborhood and local community.

Judea – the larger city, state and nation where you live.

Samaria – those who are outcasts or unnoticed, whether nearby or far away.

Ends of the Earth – people who live in foreign lands.

Take a moment and pray for you and your church to be active and intentional in taking the message of Jesus to all four of these ministry destinations. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to be effective witnesses. Pray for insight about how you are being called personally to share your faith with others.

What is the Lord revealing to you?

## Poem

What We're In On *Acts 1:7*

*If you're like me, I want to know  
Most things out of my purview  
The future, 'specially of my child,  
Evaluation preview*

*How this turns out; How will it go?  
What happens next? What's after?  
When will that start? When will this end?  
Access to my last chapter*

*What we are in on and what not  
Oft leads us to distraction  
'Cause what we know 'gainst what is not  
Is only just a fraction*

*So with disciples everywhere  
We have the age-old queries—  
When will the world be set a-right?  
When can we end our worries?*

*Instead, our LORD gives us the task  
As he holds fast our faces  
'Don't focus on the hidden things  
Be in on—witness—graces"*

*And so, we're sent out in the world  
To share eternal choices  
Christ's hope filled message of God's love  
Proclaimed with "in-on" voices*

1/12/2023  
WEEK 1 DAY 4

The  
Ascension Of  
Jesus

Read Acts 1:9-11

## Devotional

"Why do you stand here?"

That was the question the two angels asked the eleven disciples when they were gawking into the clouds as Jesus' feet disappeared into them. To be fair, you can't blame the disciples for being stunned. It's not every day that you see someone ascend into heaven.

But they had been given an order to return to Jerusalem. They had been given a promise to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had been given a mission of taking the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth. And they weren't going to accomplish any of that by craning their necks skyward. So, the angels prodded them to action:

"Why do you stand here?"

Could God be saying that to you?

There are so many people in your neighborhood who don't know Christ. Why do you stand here?

Your school is full of students who are far from God. Why do you stand here?

Your job has coworkers who are spiritually empty. Why do you stand here?

Hunger and suffering and injustice are everywhere in the world. Why do you stand here?

Those eleven disciples had just spent three years walking and talking with the Son of God. They personally witnessed the power and authority of heaven on full display in the words and works of Jesus. Now, they were watching Jesus ascend to heaven at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19). But they weren't called to bask in the glory of their spiritual experiences. They were called to make a difference. So the question is for them, and for us:

"Why do you stand here?"

## Poem

Gazing Heavenward Acts 1: 9-11a

*The Nomad*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to quell the sorrow  
Beheld the barrenness of his life  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so worthless?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Blessing

*The Outcast*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to shed the guilt of  
deceit  
Beheld the stony-ness of his  
heart  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so worthless?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Heir

*The Shepherd*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to shirk his status  
Beheld the anointing oil flow  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so worthless?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Royalty

*The Psalmist*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to number the vast lights  
Beheld the smallness of his life  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Crowned

*The Prophet*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to lift after spiritual battle  
Beheld the loneliness of  
faithfulness  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Victor

*The Magi*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to untangle  
ancient promises  
Beheld the rising of the  
star  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Wise

*The Son*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to breathe during  
crucifixion  
Beheld the abandonment  
from sin  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Resurrected

*The Disciple*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to encompass the  
vision  
Beheld the amazement of  
glory  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Commissioned

*And I*  
Gazing heavenward  
Unable to comprehend  
the grace  
Beheld the tangled life  
yarn  
Who am I?  
Why care for one so  
insignificant?  
Yet to the soul  
Descended the response  
Mine

**1/13/2023  
WEEK 1 DAY 5**

**Matthias  
Replaces  
Judas**

**Read Acts 1:12-23**

## Devotional

Jesus had chosen twelve disciples. It was an important number. There had been twelve tribes at the founding of Israel thousands of years earlier. Now that Judas had betrayed Jesus out of greed and committed suicide out of remorse, there were only eleven disciples. This wouldn't do. The apostolic ministry would need twelve leaders. They needed a replacement. So, they cast lots and chose Matthias. This is the first and last time he is mentioned in the Bible.

It is interesting that verse 25 says he was chosen for this "apostolic" ministry. In Greek the word "apostle" means "one who is sent." Nobody fits that description better than Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the evangelist. Over half of the book of Acts is dedicated to the ministry of Paul. The vast majority of the New Testament letters were written by Paul. I have often wondered if the disciples, acting before the Holy Spirit was given to them, got ahead of themselves in choosing Matthias over Paul. We simply cannot know.

Still, think of that calling to apostolic ministry to be one who is sent to others. The overall theme of this year's study is "Be on Mission." That is not simply a call for people like Peter and Matthias and Paul. It is a call for you and me. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are on mission for Jesus.

Too often, we think of missionaries as people who go to difficult places to do missionary work. That definition is not wrong. But the missionary image you are picturing might be incomplete. Do you want to see a missionary up close and personal? Look in the mirror.

This year-long study is not primarily about how God used other people to spread the good news of Jesus. It is really about how the Lord wants to use you to do it. Last year's study was called, "Be with Jesus." This year's is called, "Be on Mission." Together, they form a powerful one-two punch.

Think about your neighborhood, work, school and gym. You know, the places you live, work, learn and play. What are some ways you could be on mission in those arenas in this coming year?

## Poem

### Choreography

*The every-day-ness of life  
Routine  
Normal  
Becomes choreography  
A two-step hokey-pokey  
Where movements  
Rhythm  
Drones  
Repeatedly  
Normal*

*Then enters a change  
Crisis  
Jolt  
Recreates choreography  
A riotous jazz  
Where movements  
Chaotic  
Off balance  
Unexpected  
Throes*

*Then enters a new way  
Disconcerting  
Discontentment  
Expels choreography  
A modern dance  
Where movements  
Experiment  
Tentative  
Passionate  
New normal*



**1/16/2023  
WEEK 2 DAY 1**

**Filled With  
Holy Spirit on  
Pentecost**

**Read Acts 2:1-13**

## Devotional

Pentecost was one of the major holy feasts in the year. Jews and Gentiles who had accepted the Jewish religion traveled to Jerusalem from faraway nations for the festivities. The holy city was overflowing with thousands of people. By contrast, there were about a hundred and twenty believers in Jesus (Acts 1:15).

Some or most of these believers were packed into a house when the Holy Spirit came upon them in a dramatic way accompanied by a violent wind and tongues of fire. Many centuries earlier, the prophet Elijah heard the voice of God in a gentle whisper, rather than the powerful wind, earthquake, and fire which preceded it (1 Kings 19:11-13). No matter how He chooses to do so, when God speaks, pay attention and receive what He has to offer.

In this passage from Acts 2, when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other tongues (languages). The spiritual pilgrims from northern Africa, southern Europe, and western Asia all heard their own languages being spoken. The disciples were on fire!

All this took place in the city where Jesus had ascended to heaven just ten days earlier, that is, just fifty days after he had been crucified. As far as the religious and civil authorities were concerned, Jesus was dead and gone. This Pentecost celebration (or Feast of Weeks) would reset things and bring the Jewish religion back to normal.

But God had other ideas. He used this international gathering as a catalyst to launch the Christian movement. The collected foreigners would soon return to their respective nations. They would take with them the sights and sounds they had experienced in Jerusalem. When they heard the Galileans speaking in foreign languages, God had their attention.

The Church was ready to be born!

## Poem

**All Together, All Filled, All Speaking**  
*Acts 2: 1-4*

*When Jesus prayed  
That all may be one  
For unity  
For cohesion  
One purpose  
One love  
They were all together  
In the upper room  
They were all filled  
In their bellies  
They were all speaking  
In confusion  
A prayer  
Not yet answered*

*When Jesus prayed  
Forgive them, they do not know  
Against betrayal  
Against denial  
All scattering  
All hiding  
They were all together  
In desertion  
They were all filled  
In fear  
They were all speaking  
In whispers  
A prayer  
Not yet realized*

*When Jesus prayed  
Come, Holy Spirit  
For power  
For courage  
To gift  
To witness  
They were all together  
In one place  
They were all filled  
In the Holy Spirit  
They were all speaking  
In tongues  
A prayer  
Answered and realized*



**1/17/2023  
WEEK 2 DAY 2**

**Joel's  
Prophecy  
Fulfilled**

**Read Acts 2:14-21**

## Devotional

The Old Testament prophets had a tough job. They ministered at a time when the Jewish kings, priests, and people often turned away from the Lord and turned toward many forms of idolatry. Over 800 years before today's reading from Acts, the prophet Joel was warning the people to repent, fast, and turn back to God. If they refused (which they did) they would be destroyed by an invading army (which they were). Even so, God never gives up on His people. In Joel 2:18, the prophet declares, "Then the Lord was jealous for his land and took pity on his people."

God never gives up on His people.

That is a promise worth memorizing. When we have failed God, He never gives up on us. When others have failed us, God never gives up on us. When all seems lost, when everything is hard, when we want to give up, remember that God never gives up on His people.

These verses in Acts 2:17-21 are quoted from Joel 2:28-32. When Peter quotes them, he applies it to the spiritual bankruptcy of those around him. Remember that Peter is making this speech in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified just over seven weeks earlier. The corruption of the Old Testament kings and priests had been replaced by the corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And Jesus, who came offering a way to the heart of God, was put to death.

But, God never gives up on His people.

Read this passage again, claiming the promises made for yourself, your family, your community, and your world. What is God saying to you?

## Poem

**Stood To Stand** *Acts 2: 14*

*I've laid to lay  
My little head  
To rest on downy pillow  
I've sat to sit  
Observe a fall  
Beside a weeping willow  
I've knelt to kneel  
To beg a prayer  
As agonizing mother  
I've held to hold  
A tear-stained hand  
For sister and for brother  
I've walked to walk  
A mile or two  
With friend in conversation  
I've drawn to draw  
A gift to give  
Unique, special creation  
I've hugged to hug  
A loved one dear  
Relationship to savor  
I've stood to stand  
Bear witness to  
The grace of Christ, my Savior*

1/18/2023  
WEEK 2 DAY 3

Jesus'  
Crucifixion &  
Resurrection

Read Acts 2:22-35

## Devotional

As Peter continued his sermon that launched the Christian faith, don't forget that he was doing so in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified just over seven weeks earlier. Many in the crowd had been present when they yelled, "Crucify Him!" They knew all about Jesus.

That is why it was so bold for Peter to proclaim, "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." They had killed Jesus. Certainly they could kill Peter.

Then Peter went on to confirm the rumors that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead. He even used the words from beloved King David a thousand years earlier to point to the resurrection of the Messiah. Peter wrapped up this section of his sermon by announcing that Jesus has ascended into Heaven and was responsible for pouring out the Holy Spirit so evident on that day!

For all of Peter's faults, nobody could call him a coward. He risked life and limb to proclaim the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Messiah. He couldn't have known how it would turn out. Or could he?

Jesus had promised him and the other disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them (Acts 1:8). Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, they did (Acts 2:1-4). The promise and the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit gave Peter every confidence he needed to boldly proclaim the truth about Jesus, even in a hostile environment.

What about you? What words describe how you feel about sharing Jesus with people in your family, neighborhood, school, work or social settings? Confidence? Fear? Excitement? Anticipation? Indifference? Cowardice? Uncertainty?

Ask the Holy Spirit to come upon you and give you holy boldness to share Jesus. Ask for the same kind of power experienced and expressed by Peter!

## Poem

The "Us-Our" Plan Acts 2: 23b

*The "Us-Our" being set the plan  
Sculptured, a-sketch'd  
Purposed, full-sure  
Upon the Rock of Ages*

*The "Us-Our" being hovered o'er  
The chaos, carving forth the shores  
A-lifting, shaping  
Breathing life  
All fed by Living Water*

*Now time in place, rebellion rose  
The "Us-Our" one full 'midst the throes  
A-shaking those  
Who'd gone asleep  
The faithful Priest, King, Prophet*

*A-gifting of the "Us-Our" God  
A humbled foot upon the sod  
A-healing, tally  
Good News borne  
Long promised great Messiah*

*The "Us-Our" shofar blew aloud  
A-calling those who wandered, proud  
For you, for them  
For those unseen  
The gathering Good Shepherd*

*Now "Us-Our" said the time had come  
The plan had reached its optimum  
Pure sacrifice  
Blood altar drenched  
Behold the Lamb of God*

*The "Us-Our" then with victor's shout  
Behold, The Plan, all sorted out  
The past, the future  
In between  
The Resurrected Savior*

*A-long ago, 'fore time began  
The "Us-Our" being set the plan  
Sculptured, created  
Purposed, Sure  
Upon the Rock of Ages*



**1/19/2023  
WEEK 2 DAY 4**

**3000 People  
Repent and  
Get Baptized**

**Read Acts 2:36-41**

## Devotional

What shall we do?

It's a great question. When those gathered for the day of Pentecost heard the proclamation about Jesus, they plainly asked, "What shall we do?" They had other options. They could have ridiculed Peter. They could have attacked Peter. They could have walked away from Peter. But they didn't. The Bible says they were "cut to the heart" which prompted them to ask, "What shall we do?"

When is the last time that you were spiritually cut to the heart? Too often our hearts are hard from past pain, or mushy from cultural relativism, or immune from all the spiritual inoculations of our religious activities. But it's a whole other thing to be "cut to the heart." When that happens, we KNOW that God the Father has been moving, that Jesus has been speaking, and that the Holy Spirit has been prodding us. Ask Him to cut you to the heart.

Peter's answer to their "What shall we do?" question was, "Repent and be baptized." Again, Peter doesn't mince words. You have sin in your life. You need forgiveness for those sins. You must repent to find that forgiveness. In Luke 24:47, the resurrected Jesus told His disciples, "...repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." That is exactly what they were doing here in Acts 2 just ten days later.

Maybe you have been asking, "What shall I do?" If you are convinced and convicted about Jesus' offer of forgiveness for you, then speak this prayer of salvation to the Lord right now:

Dear heavenly Father, I admit that I have unforgiven sins in my life. I am truly sorry and ask you to forgive me. I believe that Jesus your Son lived the only perfect life in the history of the world, and that He died on a cross to take away my sins. I give you all my sins. I give you all of me. Come Holy Spirit. Fill me to overflowing with your presence. Make me a new person. Help me to live for you in everything I say and do. I love you Lord! Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, you are forgiven! Now tell another believer, so that together you may learn what it means to follow Jesus!

## Poem

Piercing Acts 2:37

*Hoping to look more than age  
All grown up  
Beauty  
Hoping in rebellion  
I asked my Mother  
All-working, sore  
Beauty  
Exhaustion  
For a piercing  
Babbles  
To display*

*Hoping to ignore then age  
The forty mark  
Beauty  
Hoping to regain  
I asked my Jeweler  
Hovered, bent  
Beauty  
Diamond  
For a piercing  
Stud  
To display*

*Hoping to equip my age  
The wisdom prayer  
Beauty  
Hoping to find  
I asked my Mentor  
Thoughtful, still  
Beauty  
Heart  
For a piercing  
Change  
To display*

*Hoping to live out my age  
The daily rule  
Beauty  
Hoping to faith  
I asked the Spirit  
Hovering, exhorting  
Beauty  
Soul  
For a piercing  
Binding tether  
To display*

**1/20/2023  
WEEK 2 DAY 5**

**How the First  
Christians  
were Devoted**

**Read Acts 2:42-47**

## Devotional

Christianity grew from about one hundred twenty people to three thousand in an instant. Praise God! It is interesting to see how these first Christians formed their lives. As you read through these, ask yourself how you are doing in your devotion to God.

### OBEDIENCE

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, which encompassed the life of Jesus, the entire Old Testament that preceded it, and the rest of the New Testament as it was unfolding in real time.

### COMMUNITY

They spent time in fellowship and shared meals in one another's homes. Nobody thought that religion was a private thing.

### PRAYER

Yes, prayer was a foundational part of their newfound faith. They couldn't imagine trying to be a follower of Jesus without a deep prayer life.

### MIRACLES

These thousands of new believers lived in the awe of signs and wonders being performed regularly in their midst. The Holy Spirit was thick!

### SELFLESSNESS

Those who had more than they needed gave of their excess to provide for those in need. Possessions were seen as gifts from God to be shared.

### WORSHIP

They met in the temple courts for corporate worship, and their public praise of God earned them the favor of the broader community.

### WITNESS

As they enjoyed the favor of the surrounding community, people continued to get saved and the Church continued to grow.

## Poem

Basic Tables *Acts 2: 46-47*

*There are patterns  
One must learn  
From counting  
One to ten  
From writing  
Numbers  
Straight, curves  
Soon tally  
Add this to that  
Then take away  
Subtract fractions  
Learn how to  
Multiply  
Divide the primes  
Learn by rote  
Keep in mind  
Basic tables*

*There are devotions  
One must practice  
From dawning  
Hours twenty-four  
From gathering  
Together  
Teaching, fellowship  
Soon number  
Add prayer to praise  
Then take away  
Subtract hoarding  
Multiply  
Divide the bread  
Learn by love  
Keep one mind  
Basic tables*





**1/23/2023  
WEEK 3 DAY 1**

**Jesus Gives  
Us Hope and  
Makes Us  
Holy**

**Read 1 Peter 1**

## *Devotional*

In this year-long study, our first detour from the book of Acts is to look at the writings of Peter. In Acts, Peter had just given a powerful sermon (Acts 2) that launched the church. When we resume with Acts, we will see him jailed and threatened for his faithful ministry in Christ's name. Those experiences changed him. They also prepared him for greater persecution that was to come under Emperor Nero. He wrote the letters of 1 & 2 Peter amid those terrible times of suffering by the early Christians.

Here, in 1 Peter 1, we are reminded that our salvation comes from Jesus as a guaranteed inheritance. Nobody can take it from us! Think about being named in a will. When the person who has included you in their will dies, it is the law that the executor of the will distributes to you exactly what is to be given to you. Now, imagine that you are named in Jesus' will, guaranteeing you all the promises and blessings of heaven. That's why verse 4 says it is "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you." Hallelujah!

But in the meantime, we still live here on earth, where things are not always so glorious. Whether tomorrow brings a rose garden of delight or a patch of thorny griefs, we are called to demonstrate genuineness of faith (v. 7) and holiness of life (v. 15). Trials and temptations will always be with us. Regardless, we are called to obey the truth and love each other (v. 22).

The reality is this: life is short. Should you live to be a hundred years old, that is a drop in the bucket of the billions, trillions, even the endless years of eternity. We are here today and gone tomorrow. So, it is good advice to plant our lives in the "living and enduring word of God" (v. 23).

This year is dedicated to that cause. We will be reading through the entire New Testament beyond the Gospels. As we study the mission of Jesus, we are being challenged to "Be on Mission" with Jesus. And there is no better place to start than dedicating ourselves to the "living and enduring word of God."

Read through this chapter again. Make note of verses that are convicting you. How is God calling you to open yourself up to live for Him?

## *Poem*

Revelation

*Hope from death  
Treasure, no moth or rust  
Protection hidden, later shown  
Great joy living inside distressing trials  
Proven faith displayed by refining fire  
gold  
Revelation of Jesus Christ  
Seeking the hidden  
Treasure, laid up inheritance  
Girded battle, later victory  
Great promise serving others sacrificially  
Sober spirit drunk on the Spirit  
Revelation of Jesus Christ*

1/24/2023  
WEEK 3 DAY 2

We Are God's  
People, Yet  
Subject to  
Others

Read 1 Peter 2

## Devotional

Peter opens this chapter by challenging you to grow up in your salvation. There you have it. Grow up!

There is nothing more precious than a baby! Lisa and I raised four babies. Now we are experiencing beautiful baby grandchildren. No offense, but ours are the cutest. Yet no matter how adorable I think they are, I would never want them to remain like that forever. Their main job is to grow up!

As such, Peter reminds us that we are called to grow up in our salvation, to grow into our true identity. He reminds us that we are chosen by God, precious to Him, living stones in God's spiritual house, a holy & royal priesthood, a chosen people, and God's special possession. Which of these descriptions do you need to grow up and reflect more in your life?

Remember that the recipients of Peter's letter were people who lived in a hostile culture. As with every child who grows up, they were subjected to the lure of sinful desires and the oppression of hateful bullies. Rather than telling them to run away, Peter challenges them to live admirably among the sinful pagans and submissively under the evil authorities! He even challenged the Christians who were slaves to endure wrongful beatings with a good conscience.

As a role model, he lifts up Christ, who was subjected to horrendous insults, suffering, and torture on the cross. Peter calls us to follow in Christ's steps of suffering. This had to be great comfort to the persecuted Christians to whom he was writing. It is to us as well.

In what ways have you been accused, insulted, rejected, or even tortured for your faith in Jesus? When this happens, how should you respond? What does it mean that we are called to "die to sins and live for righteousness?"

## Poem

Apothemanoi—to put aside 1 Peter 2:1

*Sometimes  
My car gets messy  
Trashed this and that  
Discarded straw covers, wrappers  
Used napkins and tissues  
Fast-food debris  
Stuff  
Too hurried to throw away  
Too lazy to tote inside  
Too tired to sort through  
Clutter*

*Sometimes  
My desk gets junky  
Opened correspondence, letters  
Reminding lists and sticky notes  
Tedious task piles  
Disorder  
Too rushed to sort out  
Too boring to be a priority  
Too demanding to think through  
Mayhem*

*Sometimes  
My life gets dirty  
Deep-rooted bitterness  
Covering lies, secrets  
Negative evil gossip  
Habitual exhausting habits  
Chaos  
Too proud to confess  
Too unfocused to confront  
Too comforting to put aside  
Sin*



**1/25/2023  
WEEK 3 DAY 3**

**Seek Marital  
Harmony and  
Do Good in  
Life**

**Read 1 Peter 3**

## Devotional

A little cultural context helps understand the first part of this chapter. Previously, Peter encouraged Christian people to submit themselves to the oppressive authorities and Christian slaves to submit themselves to abusive masters. He continues that thought by challenging Christian women to submit themselves to non-believing husbands. In their day, husbands had complete authority over their wives. The goal is for believing women to win their husbands to Christ through their godly behavior, and for believing men to show their wives consideration and respect. This teaching was radically counter-cultural.

It is continued in the next section, when Peter writes, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." The love of Jesus should so profoundly transform our hearts, that we love and bless others regardless of how they treat us. This teaching is radically counter-cultural for us as well.

All this is made possible only by the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus. What do each of these actions of Jesus mean for your faith? Take a look.

Christ's Death:  
"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (v. 18).

Christ's Resurrection:  
"Baptism...[is] the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (v. 21).

Christ's Ascension:  
Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (v. 22).

## Poem

*Ironical Way*

*The ways of God  
Confuse me  
And yet  
Herein lie the  
Secrets  
Of life*

*Can I trust God's ironical way?*

*First last  
Last first  
Narrow for wide  
Hard for easy  
Silence speaks  
Louder than retort  
Submit to win  
Lie down to rise up  
Peaceful demonstration  
Changed hierarchy  
Truth for lies  
Love for hate  
Blessing for cursing  
Prayer for enemies  
Live to die  
Die to live  
Give to receive  
Obtain to share  
Joy in sorrow  
Patience in suffering*

*The ways of God  
Confuse me  
And yet  
Herein lie the  
Secrets  
Of Life*

*Can I trust God's ironical Way?*

1/26/2023  
WEEK 3 DAY 4

Make  
Changes to  
Live & Suffer  
for Christ

Read 1 Peter 4

## Devotional

In this chapter Peter returns to the topic of suffering. While we don't know the exact year that he wrote 1 Peter, it was most certainly during the Nero's reign as Roman Emperor. Nero came to power at age seventeen through murderous subterfuge orchestrated by his mother. Later, when she became a threat to his power, he had his mother put to death. It was a brutal regime. Peter probably wrote this epistle from Nero's headquarters in Rome, referred to as "Babylon" in 1 Peter 5:13.

During this period, persecution of Christians was on the rise. Some were wrapped in animal skins and thrown to ravenous dogs. Some were used as fodder for the Roman appetite for brutal games. Some were set on fire as human torches to light the way when darkness fell. During his reign, Nero falsely blamed Christians for Rome burning. Persecution only intensified.

Imagine how important this letter of 1 Peter became to the persecuted Christians in the ensuing decades and centuries, when at various times Christians were arrested, believers were executed, followers of Jesus were blamed for natural disasters, clergy were martyred, adherents to the faith were tortured, churches were destroyed, Scriptures were burned, and believers were stripped of their civil rights. This epistle must have provided great comfort throughout that 250 year period.

Take a moment to read 1 Peter 4 again, visualization yourself as a follower of Christ during that period of persecution. What verses would give you the most comfort? Which ones would give you courage? How can you apply that to your life today?

## Poem

Taste Buds Edited 1 Peter 4: 1-2

*With every flower and fauna  
With every fruit and herb  
With every gourd and vegetable  
The LORD God gave a word  
"It's all there for the taking  
It's all to be enjoyed  
There's just one tree abandon  
There's just one taste avoid."*

*But with the eye we see it  
But with the ear we hear  
But with the voice it's spoken  
Temptation does appear  
"If all there for the taking  
If all to be enjoyed  
Why limit self experiment  
Why anything avoid?"*

*So with our eyes wide open  
So with rebellious heart  
So salivating greatly  
Our taste buds' edit start  
"It's all there for my taking  
It's all to be enjoyed  
My diet, I'll determine  
God's will I'll now exploit"*

*Now God's eyes see the chaos  
Now God's ears ear the cries  
Now God's heart knows the suffering  
Our gluttony despise  
"Let's bring them back to whole food  
Let's start them out on milk  
Let's move them on to chewing  
Let's offer them true steak"*

*But if our taste buds edit  
But if this is the goal  
But if our diet needs a change  
Then suffering be the road  
"I'll come to you in silence  
I'll kneel fore you a slave  
I'll do the work of editing  
Give what you truly crave"*

*And when our eyes are opened  
And when our ears unstopped  
And when we truly feast on Christ  
Old cravings will be dropped  
"LORD, meet me at the table  
LORD, set the feast for me  
LORD, edit now my taste buds  
LORD, You, my diet be"*



**1/27/2023  
WEEK 3 DAY 5**

**Whether  
Elder or  
Young, Live  
Faithfully**

**Read 1 Peter 5**

## Devotional

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." This assessment of the evil one is consistent throughout Scripture. Once when God asked Satan where he had come from, he answered, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it" (Job 1:7).

Way back before Cain killed his brother Abel, the Lord told him, "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you" (Genesis 4:7). Sadly, he gave in to those desires, as 1 John 3:12 says, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

Jesus described the devil in this way: "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Paul adds, "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

But all is not lost. The devil can be defeated by the power of God in us! The full context of today's reading from 1 Peter 5:8-9 gives us tools to defeat him: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." James 4:7-8 puts it plainly, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Satan and sin, trials and temptations have no permanent grip on those who belong to Christ. The Bible teaches us, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Yes, Satan is on the prowl, looking to devour you. But he can't have you. You belong to Christ! Be alert. Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil. Look for the way out and take it. And tell the enemy of your soul, "Away from me Satan!"

## Poem

Pasture Search Committee *1 Peter 5: 1-4*

*I'd like to find a local church  
Where Shepherd knows the Master  
Where Elders true are armored Up  
To pray against disaster*

*Where Sheep may gather bleating sweet  
The Psalmic hymns of praise  
Where Little Lambs can frolic, leap  
While older ones do graze*

*And when the thorns sink in my brow  
Or I entangled be  
There's balm enough to dress my wounds  
Or bandage up my knee*

*A field of green to lie upon  
Where butting's not allowed  
Where fold is large and gate is strong  
The foe to disavow*

1/30/2023  
WEEK 4 DAY 1

God's Call &  
Scripture's  
Prophecy

Read 2 Peter 1

## Devotional

Most scholars believe that Peter wrote this letter a few years after his first one. By this point the persecution mentioned in the previous week's devotions was in full swing. In fact, Peter himself would soon be crucified in Rome under the reign of Nero. Not feeling worthy to be executed in the same manner as Jesus, Peter was granted his request to be crucified upside down. Needless to say, things were tense for Christians in the Roman Empire.

In this second letter, Peter moves away from the topic of suffering that was so prevalent in the first letter. He focuses instead on the ways Christians should ground their faith, such as living godly lives, believing in Scripture, rebuking false teachers, and trusting in Christ until He returns.

Here in 2 Peter 1:8 he writes that if we possess an ever-increasing measure of godly qualities, they will keep us from being "ineffective and unproductive" in our knowledge of Jesus. The opposite of that is to be "effective and productive," that is, to take what we are learning about Jesus and effectually apply it to our work and witness in the world. Do you think about how effective and productive you are as an ambassador for Christ? Look again at the list of qualities we are challenged to possess (v. 5-7). Which ones do you need to grow in this year?

Peter closes this chapter by talking about the divine nature of Scripture. These days it is all the rage to claim that the authors of Scripture were simply reflecting on things related to their times. But these verses stand in stark contrast to that sentiment. Peter clearly says that the writers didn't rely on their "own interpretation of things," but "spoke from God" when they penned the Scriptures. Paul agrees, when he said, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible is not just any other book filled with culturally bound opinions. Rather, "the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). How will you allow God's word to have authority in your life as you read it this year?

## Poem

Equally Precious 2 Peter 1: 1b

<i>It's easy to be precious</i>	<i>Or what</i>
<i>If you are</i>	<i>If you are</i>
<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>Troubled</i>
<i>Compliant</i>	<i>Hypocritical</i>
<i>Witty</i>	<i>Apathetic</i>
<i>Charitable</i>	<i>Fat</i>
<i>Unstained</i>	<i>Clumsy</i>
<i>Young</i>	<i>Tired</i>
<i>Virginal</i>	<i>Dismembered</i>
<i>Silent</i>	<i>Impotent</i>

<i>It's easy to be adored</i>	<i>Is it easy to be precious,</i>
<i>If you are</i>	<i>Jesus,</i>
<i>Handsome</i>	<i>To you, if we are</i>
<i>Strong</i>	<i>Needy</i>
<i>Intelligent</i>	<i>Sickly</i>
<i>Heroic</i>	<i>Sinful</i>
<i>Gallant</i>	<i>Rebellious</i>
<i>Mature</i>	<i>Denying</i>
<i>Sexy</i>	<i>Betraying</i>
<i>Tough</i>	<i>Scared</i>
	<i>Guilty</i>

*But what*  
*If you are*  
*Broken*  
*Head-strong*  
*Dysphoric*  
*Angry*  
*Dirty*  
*Raped*  
*Out-of-control*  
*Weak*



1/31/2023  
WEEK 4 DAY 2

Beware of  
False  
Teachers

Read 2 Peter 2

## Devotional

In his first letter, Peter concentrated on the secular forces that were heaping persecution and suffering on the followers of Jesus. In his second epistle, his focus shifts to those causing problems inside the Christian community. These false teachers were introducing “destructive heresies” and “depraved conduct” among the faithful. Peter saw this as a bigger threat to Christianity than the Roman emperor who was putting believers to death!

False teachings and practices are nothing new. Peter highlighted the people in Noah’s day. Genesis 6:5 says about them, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” He also lifts up the example of the wicked people Sodom and Gomorrah, who were destroyed because they gave in to self-centeredness and sexual sin (Genesis 19). Finally, he mentioned Balaam, who sold out his religion to the highest bidder.

In similar fashion, there were some in the early Christian movement who actively participated in worship and communion, and at the same time promoted self-centered pleasures, sexual sin and greed. Peter pulls no punches, stating that “these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand” (v. 12). This behavior could be expected from the unbelieving, secular world. But for those who have given their lives to Jesus, they should know better.

So, what do we make of this for us today? I believe that a believer in Jesus is someone whose worldview is in alignment with the Word of God, while a follower of Jesus is someone whose lifestyle is in alignment with the Word of God. Peter seems to agree. Christianity should transform both how we think and how we live. Both of these are captured in Romans 12:2, which states, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

What aspects of your worldview need better alignment with the Word of God?

What aspects of your lifestyle need better alignment with the Word of God?

## Poem

The True/False Test 2 Peter 2: 1-3

Do you recall  
When back in school  
The true/false test  
With “T/F” rule?  
When you, unsure,  
Your “T” you marked  
With little line--  
An “F,” in part--  
So just in case  
The one unwise  
Who graded  
Missed the truth disguised  
And let it pass  
For answer right  
These letters fused  
To hide your plight  
Of knowing not  
The answer sure  
A passing grade  
You could procure?

And still today  
This guise goes on  
To change the truth  
To hide the wrong  
A slight change here  
A small line there  
Until the arrow’s  
Course in air  
Misses the mark  
As falsehood flies  
As ears go deaf  
And blind go eyes  
Until the “T” and “F”  
Are blurred  
And no one hears  
An honest word  
A pseudo world  
Our God detests  
As we cheat on  
The “true/false” test

**2/1/2023  
WEEK 4 DAY 3**

**The Day of  
the Lord is  
Coming**

**Read 2 Peter 3**

## Devotional

Peter wrapped up his second letter with an eye toward the return of Christ. Nobody knows when that day will be. So, what should we do? We should live our lives as if He is going to return tomorrow AND as if He is going to return in thousands of years. That tension will lead us to both inward purity and outward ministry at the same time.

As such, Peter challenges us to “live holy and godly lives” so that we will “be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” Think about it. If you knew that Jesus were returning in one week, what adjustments would you make in your life? Would you make any changes to your viewing habits? Your social media posts? Your family interactions? Your friend group conversations? Your spending patterns? Your time in Scripture and prayer?

When Peter wrote this, it was only thirty-five or so years after Jesus had ascended. He could not have known that we would be reading and studying his words two thousand years later. But using his math that a day is like a thousand years, it has been only two days since Christ ascended to heaven! He is coming back, but we just don't know when.

With that, here is another perspective. If you knew that Jesus were not returning until long after you are dead, what changes would you make in your life? Would you take the long view in developing relationships with nonbelievers? Would you be more intentional about sharing your faith with others? Would you invite more people to church? Would you make a better effort to develop lifelong community in your congregation? Would you make sure that your church had a heart for prayer? Would you contend for the faith against false teaching?

Jesus is coming back. We don't know WHEN He is coming back, but we do know THAT He is returning. Speaking about His own return, Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” It's a great question. How do you answer it?

## Poem

Blindfolded *2 Peter 3: 8*

*At birthday parties of the young  
A blindfold starts the game  
Of “pin-the-tail”  
“Pinata” whack  
The goal of hidden fame*

*With “hide and seek” and you are “it”  
“Thousand-one, now two, now three”  
Your eyes are closed  
Your hands block peek  
While facing base-spot tree*

*But when the blindfold's taken off  
And eyes darkness escape  
You see missed mark  
You find your friends  
Reality reshaped*

*And so it is in life, this truth  
If we have blindfolds still  
We'll miss the “pin”  
The truth will hide  
The goal, we'll not fulfill*

*Do not allow God's truth to hide  
But daily seek clear vision  
Though “Thousand-one,  
Now two, now three”  
God's timing, God's decision*

*So little one, don't doubt the claim  
Of Mystery's long story  
Instead by day  
Vigil by night  
Expect to see God's glory*



**2/2/2023**  
**WEEK 4 DAY 4**

**Peter Heals  
the Crippled  
Beggar**

**Read Acts 3:1-10**

## Devotional

We now return to the Peter's activity in the book of Acts. Today's reading took place some thirty-five years before he penned the two letters we just read. But those epistles gave us insight into the kind of person he was and what he thought was important.

Back here in Acts 3, it is only a few months after Jesus had been crucified. The new Christian church was just taking shape, and was still centered in Jerusalem. There, at the temple, Peter and John were going for prayer in the middle of the afternoon. The disciples saw themselves as Jews who believed that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus. Going to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and joining in the prayers was a natural expression of their faith. They had no trouble interacting in worship with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and other Jewish people.

But their faith as Messianic Jews was put on full display when they met a crippled beggar at the temple gate. When they prayed for the man, they didn't simply do so in God's name. Indeed, Peter boldly proclaimed, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." This action had three consequences:

First, the crippled man started jumping around and praising God. Second, the people were amazed, thinking Peter and John had some kind of super power. And third, the religious leaders were upset and tried to silence the two disciples. We will look at the last two responses in the next few readings.

But for now, consider the courageous action of Peter and John, ministering publicly in Jesus' name on the home turf of the religious establishment. They didn't seem concerned about the repercussions that could come their way for reaching out in the name of Jesus Christ. They simply saw a man in need.

What would it look like for you to minister to the needs of others in Jesus' name, without worrying about what others might say or do to you? Right now, think about somebody you know who has a physical, intellectual, emotional, relational, or spiritual need. Pause and name that person to Jesus. Now ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. How are you being challenged to minister to that person? What do they need that you could provide? Will you do it?

## Poem

**A Hymn for the Ninth Hour of Prayer –  
(Can be sung to "This is My Father's  
World) Acts 3: 1**

*Christ, call me come to You,  
Like prophet true of old  
Confronting life's idolatry  
Courageously and bold.  
Elijah solo stood  
Called Heaven's glory down,  
Refiner's fiery crucible  
Upon Mount Carmel's mound. 1 Kings 18:29-36*

*Christ, call me come to You,  
When in a foreign place  
Though exiled, may I constant be:  
Lord, help me seek your face.  
Like Daniel, keep me pure  
When all around is vile  
Send angels to attend my needs  
When in my time of trial. Daniel 9:20-21*

*Christ, call me come to You,  
In darkest hours of life  
When I, exhausted from my cross,  
Need strength to bear the strife.  
Like you, in ninth hour prayer,  
Pour out to You my pain  
Commit my spirit to Your hands  
Your power to hold, sustain. Luke 23: 44-46*

*Christ, call me come to You,  
Each Sabbath day of rest  
With others, seeking comfort, cure,  
May I your grace attest.  
As Peter, John, of old  
With naught but You to claim  
May I Your healing vessel be  
As I speak forth Your name. Acts 3: 1-10*

*Christ, call me come to You,  
Enlightenment to seek  
Pour out your Spirit in my dreams  
New visions, calls, do speak  
May I, Cornelius be  
New ways Your will convey  
As I respond unto your voice  
New life in me display. Acts 10: 1-8*

*Christ, call me unto You,  
When finished be my days  
With childlike trust, enter Your rest  
Til You my body raise.  
Then we meet face to face  
Life's battles ne'er and o'er  
I'll join the everlasting throng  
With You forevermore. Revelation 21: 6*

**2/3/2023**  
**WEEK 4 DAY 5**

**Peter's Call to  
Repent &  
Believe**

**Read Acts 3:11-26**

## Devotional

Seeing a crippled man instantaneously healed by Peter and John in the name of Jesus, the people ran to the two disciples like they were superheroes. Peter responds in four ways:

First, he gave God credit. Why is it important for Christians and Church leaders to be willing to give God all the credit for what is accomplished through them? What are some recent successes in your life for which you need to stop right now and give God all the glory?

Second, Peter confronted the people. Remember, he was speaking in the same place where people had shouted about Jesus "Crucify Him" less than two months earlier. Go back and read the "you" statements he made in verses 13-18. Talk about courageous! Coming clean with God begins with conviction and confession. Take a moment to reflect on any areas of your life that are out of alignment with the Word of God.

Third, Peter invited them to repent and be forgiven. People often say that they have messed up so much that even God can't forgive them. Really? Stack up your sins compared to killing the Son of God. Verses 19-20 are a beautiful promise for everyone who turns from their sins and turns to God! The word "repent" means to change one's mind. The idea is to change your mindset from thinking that a certain sin is no big deal to thinking that living for God is the only deal. In what aspects of your life do you need to turn from sin and turn to God?

Finally, once again Peter gave God credit. Beginning in verse 21 he said that everything from the entire Bible to Heaven itself declare the purpose and power of Jesus! In fact, verse 22 is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 18:15 which Moses declared some 1500 years earlier, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." Jesus is that prophet! What will you do to "listen to him?"

## Poem

Acting In Ignorance *Acts 3:17*

*Acting in ignorance  
A forbidden bite brought separation  
An angry strike brought death  
A sinful world brought destruction  
An anxious couple abused a mother and child  
A deceitful brother stole a birthright  
A jealous clan sold their brother  
An unwise husband jailed his best man  
A power-hungry pharaoh enslaved a nation  
A frustrated leader missed the promise  
A pressured guardian gave in  
A discontented people wandered  
An envious nation sought a king  
A narcissistic judge became blind  
An adulterous king killed friend and family  
An idolatrous nation went into exile  
A greedy people forgot their neighbors  
A fearful imposter killed innocent babies  
An unrepentant ruler asked for a prophet's head  
A secretive council killed their hope  
A betraying friend sold out his master  
A frightened disciple denied his beloved  
An ignorant nation crucified their messiah*

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

*Father, forgive us, for we continue acting in ignorance.*



**2/6/2023**  
**WEEK 5 DAY 1**

**Peter & John  
are Jailed for  
a Day**

**Read Acts 4:1-4**

## Devotional

In Acts 3, Peter and John healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus, then turned to the onlookers and proclaimed salvation in the name of Jesus. Here in Acts 4, the religious authorities who had schemed so carefully to have Jesus crucified “were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” Who can blame them? Jesus just wouldn’t go away!

So, for their labors, Peter and John were thrown in jail. Just days into the beginning of the Christian movement, the two de facto leaders were tossed in the slammer. During their time of training, Jesus had said to them, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:16-20). Already they were living out these prophetic words!

Despite their best efforts, the religious authorities could not stop the Christian movement from spreading like wildfire. Almost overnight the followers of Jesus grew from one hundred twenty (Acts 1:15) to three thousand (Acts 2:41) to five thousand (Acts 4:4). Why do you think Christianity was growing in such a challenging environment? What would it take to see that kind of exponential growth in your community today?

Take some time right now to pray for the gospel of Jesus Christ to advance in your neighborhood, city, nation, and world. Also, pray for people who are persecuted for their faith. Ask the Lord to give you courage to share the good news of Jesus with others!

## Poem

Two Responses *Acts 4: 1-2, 4*

*When the Spirit comes or prophet speaks,  
A believer shares or a vision peeks,  
Will you be disturbed? Will you turn  
away?  
Will you hate the source? Will you rue the  
day?  
Or will you choose to listen, lean?  
Respond with joy? Faith intervene?  
Allow your life to be made new;  
A recreated God-led you?  
The responses to these blessed times  
Your future sure will redefine  
And set a course you can't retrace  
Be stuck or walk in vibrant grace.*

**2/7/2023**  
**WEEK 5 DAY 2**

**Salvation in  
No One but  
Jesus**

**Read Acts 4:5-12**

## Devotional

A few months earlier, when Jesus was arrested, the first two people who confronted Him were Annas and Caiaphas. Here they are again, this time harassing Peter and John. Perhaps they had made Jesus into some sort of hero martyr. Now this Jesus thing was getting out of control. They wanted to get to the bottom of how they healed the crippled beggar, so they asked, "By what power or what name did you do this?"

The answer of these jailed apostles was straightforward, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." In this statement they were putting their lives at risk.

First, Peter declared His name, Jesus of Nazareth, a name that was well known to the former high priest Annas and his son-in-law the current high priest Caiaphas. These men pressured the Jewish and Roman authorities to have Jesus of Nazareth crucified, and Pontius Pilate put that name on a sign above Jesus' head on the cross (John 19:19). It was a name they would never forget.

Second, Peter referred to Jesus as Christ, which is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. It was a bold declaration that Jesus is the anointed Son of God, the very truth of which the high priests refused to believe and for which they had Jesus put to death.

Third, Peter boldly proclaim that the man they painstakingly crucified didn't stay dead. God raised Jesus to new life. It was in the power of this resurrected Jesus that the crippled man stood before them healed. Any one of these statements would have ticked off this high priest family with mob-like powers. But making all three at once had to make their blood boil.

And finally, Peter concluded with a straightforward truth about Jesus: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Salvation could not be found in their religious rituals or legalistic laws, but only in the name of Jesus Messiah, the resurrected Son of God!

## Poem

*How Many Times Acts 4: 5-7*

*How many times must the gang  
assemble—  
Rulers, elders, scribes, high priests,  
Annas, Alex, John, Cai'phas,  
To question, guilty conscience soothe  
To kick against the goads of truth  
How many will they throw in jail  
And beat with rods, pierce hands with nails  
While flinging lies  
And dealing bribes  
Rebury risen Savior*

*How many times will Christians stand—  
Peter, Andrew, James and John  
Thomas, Matthew, Paul and I  
To answer, o'er and o'er to tell  
The mystery, Salvation's well  
Of Living Water, Risen King,  
Of full atonement offering  
From Jesus' blood  
Grace from above  
Proclaim our risen Savior*

*As many times as God allows—  
The strong, the weak, the small, the proud  
In secret or from pulpit loud  
Announcing Good News to the poor  
Forgiveness, peace as central core  
The Spirit's gifts and holy fruit  
Unlocking chains, uncovering truth  
The church's call  
For one and all  
Extol our risen Savior*



2/8/2023  
WEEK 5 DAY 3

They had  
been with  
Jesus

Read Acts 4:13-22

## Devotional

Peter and John were still standing before the high priest and his family, sort of a spiritual syndicate with crime family power. But these two followers of Jesus stymied them. Three reasons stand out.

One, they were unschooled, ordinary men. Peter and John had been fishing partners from the backwaters of Galilee up north before Jesus called them. They were hardly a threat to the highly educated and esteemed Sadducees who ran the temple of Jerusalem in the south.

Two, they “took note that these men had been with Jesus.” There is something about that phrase that makes all the difference. It doesn’t matter if you are schooled or unschooled. It makes no difference if you are ordinary or extraordinary. Never mind if you just came from the high priest’s palace or a criminal’s jail. All that matters is if you have been with Jesus!

Three, Caiaphas and his crooked family knew that thousands of people were joining the Jesus team because of the healing of the crippled man. Eliminating Peter and John might only make the crowd go into a frenzy. So, they applied pressure and commanded the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. Certainly they would comply. Nobody said no to the high priest.

Nobody except Peter and John. They stared down the most powerful religious authority in the land and said, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” The high priest’s family should have known this was coming. They said it themselves. These men had been with Jesus. Nothing could undo that.

In review, here were Peter and John’s qualifications for ministry. They were unschooled and ordinary. They had been with Jesus. They ministered in the name of Jesus. Do you qualify?

## Poem

With Jesus Acts 4: 13

*Remember the poem of the old violin  
When at auction, received not a glance  
Until being held by the master musician  
Whose skill birth a melodic dance  
The piece seen as worthless, transformed  
by a touch  
Left the scoffers by glory entranced  
And once the Creator displayed its true  
worth  
Paddles rose hoping purchase their chance*

*Imagine the jolt Peter, John gave the men  
Who assumed they were dumb, common-  
place  
Yet articulate words boldly filled their two  
mouths  
Speaking truth to lives mired in disgrace  
Dumbfounded men noted, “We’ve seen  
them with Jesus!”  
Fully shocked, all assumptions displaced  
The common and simple seen in the  
world’s eyes  
Became holy by Love’s changing grace*

*Embrace full this message of transforming  
power  
When you think, ‘What would God want  
with me?’  
Remember the scarred and marred old  
violin,  
The two fishermen called from the sea  
How once, though discarded by hands of  
the world,  
The Master their worth guaranteed.  
No matter your background, education or  
race  
When with Jesus, you’ll remarkable be*

**2/9/2023  
WEEK 5 DAY 4**

**Enable Your  
Servants to  
Speak**

**Read Acts 4:23-31**

## Devotional

Peter and John had just healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus. In response, the crowds began to put faith in Jesus, but the religious establishment was not so kind. They tossed the two apostles in jail overnight, then threatened them to stop ministering in Jesus' name the next day.

When they were released, they went back to their friends and prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." In the face of promised persecution, the followers of Jesus asked the Lord for bold words and powerful signs in the name of Jesus! And God answered their prayer. Just look at the last verse of this passage again!

Imagine if they had prayed for safety or protection amidst the threats. Imagine if they had prayed for comfort or peace in the face of persecution. Imagine if they had prayed for anything but bold words and powerful signs. Now look at the last verse again and speculate about what it might have said.

Our prayers are a portal between our hearts and heaven. They reveal our passions and priorities, our hopes and fears. Our prayers are a declaration to God of what we desire for Him to do in our lives. They are a statement of faith and a promise of action.

Our theme for this year is "Be on Mission." We are being called to live like the New Testament followers of Jesus who took the Gospel to people near and far. As you think about your part in the mission of Jesus, what do you need to pray for?

Gather a few index cards, sticky notes, or your phone. Write down a prayer that is both a statement of faith and a promise of action as you consider how God is calling you to be on mission to those with whom you live, work, learn and play. Share it with some other believers. Then, pray this prayer often until God does it!

## Poem

*Prayer Acts 4:29-31*

*Just how do you pray  
When great evil besets  
Do you gasp out in fear  
With full rescue requests  
Or pray back to God  
Hope's true promises set  
Just how do you pray  
When great evil besets*

*For what do you pray  
When the going gets tough  
Do you seek an escape  
When the battle is rough  
Or ask for great boldness  
Truth's false foe to rebuff  
For what do you pray  
When the going gets tough*

*And thus when you pray  
What do you then expect  
Peace, quiet and calm  
Your essence protect  
Or for lives to be shaken  
Christ's full gospel project  
And thus when you pray  
What do you then expect*



**2/10/2023**  
**WEEK 5 DAY 5**

**Believers**  
**Share**  
**Possessions &**  
**Testify**

**Read Acts 4:32-37**

## Devotional

Cyprus is an island nation in the Mediterranean Sea off the coasts of Syria and Turkey. A Jewish community lived there, and Joseph was a Levite, meaning a spiritual leader among them. He was one of the many Jews who were putting their faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God.

And Joseph was all in. When the apostles in Jerusalem called for a free-will offering to alleviate the needs of the poor, Joseph sold a field (probably from back in his homeland of Cyprus) and gave the money to the Church for distribution to the poor. He simply cared more about the others' needs than his own.

So, the apostles gave Joseph a nickname. They called him Barnabas, a name denoting just how much of an encourager he was. And this "son of encouragement" lived into his name. When Paul stopped killing Christians and became one himself, Barnabas vouched for him so that he would be accepted by the apostles. He shows up throughout the book of Acts as he travels, preaches, prays and helps form the Christian movement among both Jews and Gentiles. In some ways, this "encourager" paved the way for the gospel to become what it is today.

What is your name? Why did your parents name you that? Do you like it? In what ways do you live into your name?

Now, what is God's name for you? Think about your spiritual gifts, strongest character traits, and your ministry passions. God gave those to you! Be creative! What is God's name for you? Do you like it? How is God calling you to live into that name?

## Poem

Abundance Acts 4: 32

*I once heard a story about heaven's  
place  
Where believers encircled a feast of  
sheer grace  
But each arm could not bend to lift food  
to the face  
So each one fed another  
All sharing*

*The same story's told of the darkness in  
hell  
Where abundance still reigned, unbent  
arms there as well  
But each only thought their own hunger to  
quell  
So each sat impoverished  
All starving*

*When I think of God's earth, the  
abundance abounding  
And consider how most live with vast  
hunger surrounding  
How unbent arms, hard hearts keep hell's  
mindset compounding  
I am cut to the quick  
All ashamed*

*So let us not think of our own mouths to  
feed  
Spend creation's abundance, our own  
lives thus to please  
But reach out to others, share to meet  
others' need  
And see heaven on earth  
All fulfilling*

**2/13/2023  
WEEK 6 DAY 1**

**God is Light  
and Calls Us  
to Walk in  
Light**

**Read 1 John 1**

## Devotional

So far in this study we have seen that Peter and John are front and center as the Christian movement gets underway. We have already explored the letters of 1 & 2 Peter to gain deeper insight into his mind and heart. For the next seven readings we will do the same with his ministry partner as we explore 1, 2 & 3 John.

Around the same time, he also wrote the Gospel of John. At the very end of this study, we will take a look at Revelation, another of John's writings. All of John's books were penned some 55-65 years after Jesus ascended to heaven, making John an aging man at the time. By then, likely all the other apostles had been martyred. John was living in Ephesus, which we shall see time and again in this study. He was sort of the "apostle emeritus" of first century Christianity.

In all of his Biblical works, John contrasts key themes, such as love and hate, light and darkness, good and evil. Also, John writes from an eternal perspective, looking all the way back to the beginning of time and all the way forward to the fulfillment of time. Take a moment to compare Genesis 1:1 with John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1. What is John trying to say?

Now, look at all of the reading from today again. What themes jump off the page? What is the competing force working against the goodness of God? What is the promise if we live our lives in the virtues? What is the result for camping out in the vices?

## Poem

Experiencing God *1 John 1:3-4 MSG*

*It's one thing to hear  
From someone  
About something  
Exciting  
Life-changing  
Stupendous  
But  
To experience it  
To witness it  
To be present for it  
With all your senses  
Vibrating  
Dazzling  
Stirred-up  
That  
Dear One  
Is to experience  
God's presence  
God's love  
God's light  
God's divine action  
In your very  
Life  
Its seconds  
Its minutes  
Its fleeting hours  
Changing everything  
Leaving you  
Speechless  
Awed  
Laughing  
Over-joyed*





**2/14/2023  
WEEK 6 DAY 2**

**Jesus Forgave  
Our Sins &  
Calls Us to  
Obey**

**Read 1 John 2**

## Devotional

Grab a large sheet of paper. As quickly as you can from memory, write down everything that Jesus said and did. Make it a work of art. Write down a phrase or even a single word to remind yourself of something Jesus said. Draw a symbol or a picture to represent something Jesus did. Scribble a line from a hymn or song. Don't worry. Nobody is going to hang your work of art in the Sistine Chapel. Go ahead and do this before you move on to the rest of this devotional reading.

Now that have created a montage of Jesus' life, add the words of 1 John 2:6 in big letters: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

Okay, this little art project just got real. For John, being a follower of Jesus was not merely about getting your heart aligned with His, it was also about getting your lifestyle aligned with His.

As you look over your Jesus mosaic, do some self-examination. In what ways are you walking as Jesus did? Are there any ways in which you are going your own way? If so, John gives us some insights as to why, when he writes, "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Are any of these your black hole, leading you places you don't desire to go? Are any of them holding you back from walking as Jesus did? What does God want you to do about it?

## Poem

Guide 1 John 2:1 The MSG

*When I was young and had to go  
To school along a way  
I had a Guide—my brother's hand  
His steps the path conveyed*

*When older grew, horizons spanned  
To places yet uncharted  
I had a Guide—unfolded map  
The roads their courses marked*

*When now I drive, my Google Maps  
Plans routes with great precision  
I use this Guide quite easily  
With trust without decision*

*When in my life Sin overwhelms  
Aware or hidden deeply  
I need a Guide—Christ's rod and staff  
Repentance ever meekly*

*And so my hand unfolds the Map  
Of scripture ever guiding  
Trustworthy plans of Comfort's voice  
My Guide o'er me presiding*

**2/15/2023  
WEEK 6 DAY 3**

**We Are God's  
Children;  
Love Him &  
Others**

**Read 1 John 3**

## Devotional

John uses the word sin over fifteen times in this five chapter letter. Here are a few excerpts from 1 John on the topic of sin. Reflect on these for your own life.

### FAILURE IN SIN

All wrongdoing is sin (5:17).

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (3:4).

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work (3:8).

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1:8).

### FORGIVENESS FOR SIN

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1:7).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1:9).

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (2:2).

### FREEDOM FROM SIN

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin (3:5).

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God (3:9).

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them (5:18).

## Poem

Called *1 John 3:1 NRSV*

*Born into this world  
With the curse of my  
parents upon me  
From Adam and Eve  
Through all genera-  
tions  
The stench of sin  
could not be  
Perfumed away  
Covered up  
Washed clean  
Atoned for  
And so I was left  
Abandoned  
Doomed  
Dead at birth  
Called  
A child of pity and  
woe*

*I wandered streets  
With the rags of my  
sin upon me  
From trash bins  
scrounged  
Old ways, old paths  
The holes of sin  
could not be  
Re-woven  
Patched up  
Re-sewn  
Amended  
And so I was left  
Naked  
Ashamed  
Unrighteous  
Called  
A child of wretched-  
ness, lone*

*Born into this world  
With the grace of his  
Father upon him  
And virgin Mary  
Hope of all generations  
The stench of sin could  
not be  
Present in his presence  
Cleaned up  
Washed clean  
Atoned for  
Wherever he walked  
Welcomed  
Rescued  
Healed  
Called  
The Son of Man*

*He wandered streets  
Handing out righteous  
robes for rags  
Scrounging through  
trash bins  
New ways, new path  
New wine, new wine-  
skins  
Re-created  
Patched up  
Re-born  
Atoned  
And so I was found  
Naked  
Re-claimed  
His righteousness  
Called  
A child of God, grace  
saved*



2/16/2023  
WEEK 6 DAY 4

Test the  
Spirits & Love  
One Another

Read 1 John 4

## Devotional

Love.

That single word speaks volumes about God and His people. When John wrote his gospel he said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In 1 John 3:1 he wrote, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Here is the inescapable truth - God loves you!

Yesterday we saw that John used the word sin about fifteen times in this epistle. But did you know that, in this same little letter, he used the word love twenty five times? In fact, these two themes come together in 1 John 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Love conquers sin!

Go back and read today's passage again, focusing on the verses that talk about love. If you have time, read chapters 2-4 of this letter for many of the occurrences of the word love in 1 John. As you find the verses, answer some questions:

What does this teach us about God?

What does this teach us about Christians?

What is God saying to me?

## Poem

Spirits 1 John 4:1-3

*There are goblins and ghosts  
Witches, warlocks and hosts  
Of all sorts of mists, mythic and true  
Which come out to play  
Innocents to array  
In the darkness a-ready to "Boo!"*

*The truth now is this  
They are not just a myth  
Or a mystical play to delight in  
For the spirits will haunt  
Their great evil to flaunt  
Souls wide open will they capture by sin*

*So, first advice this  
Do not play with these wisps  
Or invite them to join in your party  
Stay away from their games  
Do not invoke their names  
They wreak havoc for which you'll be sorry*

*Rather, heed now you this  
Evil spirits resist  
And instead test the spirits aright  
Ask them not of the future  
(For they love The Accuser)  
But inquire what they say about Christ*

*God's pure Spirit will claim  
Jesus Christ by full name  
Who was sent by our Father in heaven  
There won't be any doubt  
From this life-giving fount  
Who proclaims Christ and aces each ques-  
tion*

*For you see the true Spirit  
Will lead you to inherit  
Salvation's full treasure and life  
This Paraclete wonder  
Your soul will not plunder  
But instead put all chaos aright*

**2/17/2023  
WEEK 6 DAY 5**

**Believe in  
Jesus &  
Receive  
Eternal Life**

**Read 1 John 5**

## Devotional

It's all about Jesus.

In John's gospel he quoted Jesus as saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Here in his epistle he confirms this truth, finally saying, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Life can be hard at times. Temptation, evil, doubt, sickness and brokenness permeate our relationships, character and faith. Our faithfulness as well as our sins might be hidden from others, but they are in plain sight to God. This sentiment is echoed in verse 19 which says, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." At the same time I am a child of a perfect God and a citizen of a broken world.

The answer is Jesus. He gives us hope. He forgives our sins. He commissions us to change the very world that is trying to change us. He calls us to be on mission with Him.

What about you? Are you done trying to either survive or thrive in this world on your own power? Are you ready to surrender your life to Jesus alone? If so, offer this prayer to God with all your heart so that you may know that you have eternal life!

Dear Father in Heaven,

I admit that I have sinned. I have tried to do things my own way. I am not worthy of Your grace. But I believe that You sent Your Son Jesus to die for me. I believe that He came to take away my sins. So, today I repent of my sins. I turn away from my sins and turn toward You. Please forgive me and help me to live for You. Send me Your Holy Spirit to live in me and guide me into all truth. Thank You God for loving me so much!

Amen

## Poem

War 1 John 5:4

*You can build bombs and missiles and  
store them in silos  
You can fashion your iron to spears  
You can train up your soldiers and teach  
them the coldness  
They will need to demolish their peers  
You can spread propaganda, seek  
enemies random  
You can build fancy chariots and tanks  
You can promise them glory, never  
mention the gory  
Of witnessing death in their ranks  
You can claim to be winners and your  
enemies, sinners  
You can break and mold scarred  
hardened hearts  
And the wars will continue while young  
ravage sinew  
As the world tears each other apart  
But you never will conquer as earth's  
resources squander  
Until you discover what's true  
That no wars will be won 'til we all know  
the Son  
Who will come to make everything new  
Then all those born of God who walk on  
this earth's sod  
Will know victory never imagined  
For they'll conquer with faith, Christ new  
life will create  
And death, war and sin will then end*



2/20/2023  
WEEK 7 DAY 1

Have Faith,  
Love &  
Obedience in  
Jesus

Read 2 John

## Devotional

Truth.

When being questioned by Pontius Pilate after His arrest, Jesus said, "The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37). Pilate retorted, "What is truth?"

Truth has always been a controversial topic. These days, people like to say that they want to "live their truth," as if whatever makes a person happy is truth. But Jesus had something different in mind. He wasn't talking about a subjective form of "be true to yourself." By contrast, He calls people to be true to Him, because He is the truth (John 14:6). He also said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

In the one chapter letter of 2 John, the apostle compares truth with deception. What do each of these phrases mean to you?

Walking in truth (v. 4)

Walking in obedience (v. 6a)

Walking in love (v. 6b)

I love the praise John lifts up in verse 4, when he writes, "It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth." Remember, this letter was written about sixty years after Jesus' ascension and about forty years after Paul's ministry in Ephesus, from where John was writing. By then, believing families and churches had raised up second and third generation believers. There is no greater joy for Christian parents and communities of faith than to see their young ones grow to walk in the truth of Jesus!

How is God calling you and your church to invest in the spiritual future of the next generation?

## Poem

Who Is She, This Chosen Lady?  
2 John 1:1-2

*In scripture there are women oft'  
who play important roles  
A slave girl teaches captain strong,  
a miracle to show  
A prostitute hides Israel spies,  
extoiled for faith she shines  
A foreigner becomes a bride and  
joins Messiah's line  
A widow dressed as prostitute secures love's  
seed by choice  
Surprisingly, wise judges rule with strength,  
feminine voice  
A woman wins the war for all by spike  
in captain's head  
A wife of soldier, bathing, soon is swept into  
king's bed  
A barren wife births prophet true, an old one  
bears a son  
A virgin girl betrothed and pure conceives  
anointed One  
Two sisters witness Jesus raise their  
brother from death's prison  
A woman plagued with demons, healed,  
announces "Christ is risen!"  
A wife, Priscilla, knows the truth,  
corrects misguided author  
A weaver of great purple cloth  
starts synagogue by water  
A grandma, mother, raise a boy who soon  
becomes a preacher  
And if you check out churches now  
most women are the teachers  
So, who is John referring to  
"the lady God has chosen?"  
She guards the words of wisdom and delivers  
truth in motion  
She fills the pulpit, tends the sick and  
keeps the kitchen hopping  
When caring for the children poor,  
she usually does the shopping  
Her prayers they rise, her tears fill bowls within  
great heavens coffers  
Her widow's mite, her elbow grease,  
her poured out nard she offers  
It's Christ himself who calls them forth,  
these ladies God-elected  
The Spirit calls each one to tasks  
which he alone selected*

**2/21/2023  
WEEK 7 DAY 2**

**Selfishness  
vs.  
Selflessness**

**Read 3 John**

## Devotional

In 1993 Charles Barkley was at the top of his game as a star for the Phoenix Suns when he said in a Nike commercial, "I am not a role model. I'm not paid to be a role model. I'm paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court. Parents should be role models. Just because I dunk a basketball doesn't mean I should raise your kids." The reactions were all over the place.

Thirty years later we are still trying to figure out who our role models should be. Actually, 2000 years earlier the Christians in the early church were struggling with the same concept. In this short book of the Bible, John lifts up a few potential role models in the Christian community.

Gaius was the picture of selflessness. He was lifted up for his faithfulness to the truth of Jesus, which was no easy task considering the persecution going on under the iron fist of the Roman emperor Domitian. Gaius was also lauded for the way he showed hospitality to strangers who had come to town for some sort of ministry.

By contrast, Diotrephes was the poster child for selfishness. It's hard to imagine how he had a following in the church. Maybe it was time spent. Diotrephes had a me-first, rumor-mongering, ignore-the-strangers attitude. John, the elder statesman of the early Christian church, said he would call him out when he visited.

In verse 11, John reminded the people, "Do not imitate what is evil but what is good." There it is again. The challenge to imitate the right role models. Choose well, and your life steps will be on the right path. Choose poorly, and you will be headed toward a steep cliff.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul boldly said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." There you have it. Follow somebody who is following Jesus.

Who is somebody in your life that could be a worthy role model?

## Poem

Letter To Rejoice

*My Gaius friend—I call "rejoice"—  
To you I write with eager voice  
Because your love of God is choice—  
You minister to others!*

*You open up your home with care  
And everyone is welcomed there  
Each feels their burdens you do share  
You minister to others!*

*And so, it is great joy you bring  
Not just to me but to our King  
For all your life is offering  
You minister to others!*



**2/22/2023  
WEEK 7 DAY 3**

**A Case Study  
in Honesty**

**Read Acts 5:1-11**

## Devotional

For the next eight readings we are back to the narrative of the book of Acts, not long after the time of Jesus. We left off with the story of Barnabas the encourager, who willingly sold some land he owned and gave the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor in Jerusalem. As a natural extension of his generosity, Barnabas had great influence in the development of the early church.

By contrast, this passage tells the tragic tale of Ananias and Sapphira. This married couple ended up dead for doing something that looked similar to what Barnabas had done.

They owned some land. Check.

The sold some of the land. Check.

They gave money from the proceeds for the poor. Check.

They pretended to be giving it all, but kept back some for themselves. Uncheck.

The problem wasn't the amount of the gift, or even the percentage of the gift. The problem was the object of the deception, namely, that they lied to God.

Motives matter. In James 4:2-3, the Bible says, "You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Jesus put it like this, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

Once again, compare these two gifts of generosity. Barnabas gave authentically, and for that he helped change the world. Check.

Ananias and Sapphira gave deceptively, and for that they died. Check mate.

## Poem

Generosity?

*I want to be like Barnabas accessing all  
his coffer  
And sacrificially decides the bounty he  
can offer  
He sells his land, He takes the gain  
God's altar there it will remain  
Until it's needed to sustain  
A sister or a brother*

*Don't let me be like jealous ones  
Who witness gifts of gen'rous sums  
And hope to gain a sim'lar fame  
With pomp, their own gifts to proclaim  
While in their pockets some remains  
Thought hidden, greed succumbs*

*Which will I be? Life giver? Death?  
Will my heart pass the test of breadth  
Of words I speak, The motive bared  
Left hand clueless of righthand share  
Or will I covet honored stare  
While falsely feigning depth?*

**2/23/2023  
WEEK 7 DAY 4**

**The Apostles  
Heal Many**

**Read Acts 5:12-16**

## Devotional

The early church grew at a rapid rate, impacting Jerusalem and the surrounding communities. News spread that God's power and presence was available for all. The sick were healed, the possessed were freed, and the lost were saved as the Christian movement continued to move.

Right before this reading is the passage about Ananias and Sapphira, who died after they tried to deceive God and the church leaders. Verse 11 is the transition from that episode to today's reading. It says, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." How does this verse set up the activity of the believing community you read about in today's passage?

Taken together, these recent readings from Acts mention a number of traits that were important to the launch of Christianity. Discern why each of these is important for a healthy church:

Christ-centered.

Courageous leadership.

Authentic generosity.

Obedience to God.

Fear of the Lord.

Spirit-filled believers.

The power of God.

## Poem

Recall

*I do recall that rainy day  
Bicycle tires both went astray  
Deserting me on gravel splayed  
A-crying for my mommy  
And as I walked the homeward way  
My knee and leg deep gash displayed  
Imbedded stony the sinew flayed  
With no one 'round to calm me  
At last, my struggling feet conveyed  
Me to my home so far away  
Where Mother dear did then survey  
Emotional tsunami  
She reached out with great sympathy  
And cleansed and dressed my wounded  
knee  
Removing rock and dirt debris  
While I cried on her breast  
With calming voice, she pet my head  
And gently ushered me to bed  
She rescued me from utter dread  
Allowing me full rest  
Today that day I still recall  
Alone I was, the tragic fall  
The sobbing, wailing, calling bawl  
Entreating one to help me  
The long walk home of prodigal  
The hope for comfort from the maul  
The pain from deeply cutting spill  
The stony grime a-tearing  
The open arms, the tender care  
The words of love which filled the air  
The rest received in my despair  
The healing all a-giving*



**2/24/2023**  
**WEEK 7 DAY 5**

**The Apostles  
Rejoice in  
Suffering**

**Read Acts 5:17-42**

## Devotional

Not long before this, Peter and John had been jailed overnight, then with threats the religious leaders ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. They boldly replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him?" (Acts 4:19).

Here, perhaps even more of the apostles were jailed, then miraculously freed. The religious leaders tracked them down and reminded them of their cease and desist order. Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29).

Keep in mind that they were appearing before the Sanhedrin, the same religious authorities who condemned Jesus to death only a few months earlier. What do you find in their responses that is empowering, encouraging, challenging, or disheartening to you as you express your faith where you live, work, learn and play?

In the end, the apostles were "rescued" by a respected Pharisee named Gamaliel. Many years later, when Paul was defending his credentials, he said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today" (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was so respected that the mere mention of his name gave the speaker credibility.

Here in Acts 5, Gamaliel's speech convinced the group of seventy Pharisees and Sadducees to let the apostles go free, but not before flogging them and restating their command to stop speaking in Jesus' name. The name of Jesus. The Name. What power it has! What authority it has! What promise it has!

As the apostles walked away with ripped and bleeding backs, they were "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (v. 41). What does the Name of Jesus mean to you?

## Poem

To Whom Do I Listen?

*To whom do I listen?  
Who will I obey?  
Just who will have power  
My choices to sway?  
The ones who do bully?  
The ones in the crowd?  
The ones with the power?  
The ones shouting loud?  
The ones who are angry  
Who frighten me most?  
The ones who can shame me  
In throng, how they boast!  
Or the one who breaks prison's bars  
Shackled are free?  
The one who brings power-filled  
Each to their knee?  
The one who speaks whispers  
To Spirit filled heart?  
The one who can hear each prayer  
Uttered in dark?  
The one who moves mountains?  
Who makes blind ones to see?  
The one who gave everything  
Just to save me?  
To whom do I listen?  
Who will I obey?  
Just who will have power  
My being to sway?*

**2/27/2023**  
**WEEK 8 DAY 1**

**Solving  
Church  
Growth  
Problems**

**Read Acts 6:1-7**

## Devotional

People sometimes get disillusioned when they discover that the church they attend is not perfect. There is a naïve expectation that church leaders and members should be conflict-free all the time. But where two or three are gathered together, there is usually disagreement!

This truth was evident even in the first years of Christianity. In today's reading, we see conflict over who had access to the food pantry. The Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews were being overlooked in favor of the local Hebraic (Hebrew-speaking) Jews. All of them were Messianic Jews, that is, they believed in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. They were all Christians! Yet favoritism reared its ugly head when it came to distributing food to the poor.

Look at the qualifications of people like Stephen who were selected to take care of this responsibility of equitably managing the food pantry:

"Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (v. 3).

"They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 5).

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people" (v. 8).

Do any of these qualities surprise you? Why were they essential to creating a team to oversee food distribution? Which of these qualifications are still important for church leadership today? Why? What did their selection free the apostles to focus on in verse 4? What was the result in verse 7? How should this guide us today?

## Poem

**Give Me Some Men!**

*Give me some men who are soft-  
hearted men  
Who have planted God's word in  
their hearts  
Give me some men who are brave-  
hearted men  
Who when pressed will from God  
not depart  
Give me some men who will kneel  
down to serve  
Who see each one as precious to  
God  
Give me some men who will share  
the Good News  
Who will travel with feet gospel shod  
Give me some men who will stand  
all alone  
And will speak truth to all who will  
heed  
Give me some men who will wait on  
the Lord  
And stoop down, orphan, widows to  
feed  
Give me some men who inspire all  
around  
As they pray fervently, Spirit-clad  
Give me some men and the church  
will arise  
And will shout, "Let the righteous be  
glad!"*



**2/28/2023  
WEEK 8 DAY 2**

**Stephen is  
Seized by the  
Sanhedrin**

**Read Acts 6:8-15**

## Devotional

The Sanhedrin just couldn't get rid of Jesus. This group of seventy Pharisees and Sadducees was instrumental in having Jesus crucified. They had hoped that this would end it. But His followers somehow believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had appeared to them over a period of forty days before ascending to heaven.

Then, these followers created even more of a mess, converting, baptizing, teaching, healing, and discipling others in the name of Jesus. So the religious authorities jailed the leaders of these rebels, flogged them, and ordered them to stop ministering in the name of Jesus. This only encouraged the apostles, who were commissioning more leaders for this unruly movement. Even one of their food pantry leaders was performing great wonders and teaching in the name of Jesus. How exhausting for the Sanhedrin! They frantically wanted to stop it.

But the movement was already set in motion. Thousands of people from northern Africa, western Asia, and southern Europe had been present when the church was miraculously born on Pentecost. Far from being discouraged, the apostles were actually encouraged to continue their work when they were persecuted. As Acts 6:7 reports, "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." Even some of the Jewish priests were being won to Jesus! The Sanhedrin had to be at wits' end.

So when Stephen was ratted out by some freed prisoners from all over the Roman Empire, they jumped at the opportunity. Normally, the Sanhedrin probably wouldn't have given any attention to the Synagogue of the Freedmen. But these were becoming desperate times and they called for desperate measures.

Take some time to pray for your church, your denomination, and the Christian church around the world. Pray for God to end persecution, but when not, for believers to stand strong in the midst of any persecution.

## Poem

Running Over

*As child  
I had chubby fists clenched  
Circling round  
And a-round  
And a-round  
A song I did sing  
Cupped hands—offering  
I'd point to the sky  
Clap hands joyfully  
Then circle around  
And a-round*

*I heard  
About Stephen with grace  
Running over  
And again  
And again  
How his love cup kept  
Running over  
As the Spirit kept  
Filling and pouring  
Then anointing again  
And again*

*I memorized  
Psalm of a Good Shepherd King  
Filling cup  
Running over  
And over again  
Through dark valleys  
Protecting from  
Enemies strong  
Fill my cup  
Running over  
And over again*

**3/1/2023**  
**WEEK 8 DAY 3**

**The Legacy of  
Abraham,  
Isaac, Jacob &  
Joseph**

**Read Acts 7:1-16**

## *Devotional*

Recall the accusations made against Stephen by false witnesses, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place (the temple) and against the law (the first five books of the Old Testament). For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:13-14). Now, the high priest of the Sanhedrin pointedly asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

Quickly think of all the ways Stephen could have answered this question. What might the results have been?

Instead of all these options, Stephen gave these experts in the Old Testament a lesson in the Old Testament! In today's reading, he covered the book of Genesis beginning with Abraham who obediently followed God's promises and ending with Joseph (Abraham's great-grandson) who was enslaved in Egypt before becoming second in command to Pharaoh.

It is interesting that this man who was tapped to lead the food distribution ministry was so well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. He was so confident in his knowledge of Scripture that he used it as a defense when being questioned by the top religious authorities of his day.

Why is it important for every believer (not just pastors and church staff) to be thoroughly knowledgeable about the Bible? What strategy and plan could you develop for knowing Scripture better? How will this help you in your journey of faith? Will you do it?

## *Poem*

One Sermon

*If I had one sermon  
One sermon to preach  
If I had one crowd  
One crowd mine to reach  
If I had one moment  
The best news to tell  
If I had one chance  
Others' fears to dispel  
If I had one last word  
A people to reach  
If I had one sermon  
Just what would I preach*

**3/2/2023  
WEEK 8 DAY 4**

**The Legacy of  
Moses & the  
Prophets**

**Read Acts 7:17-53**

## Devotional

Four hundred years passed between the previous verse and the opening verse of today's reading. In that time, the Hebrew people grew greatly in number while living in Egypt. Pharaoh's answer to this growing population of Jewish people was to enslave them, oppress them, and systematically eliminate them. So God raised up Moses.

Stephen, still being accused and questioned by the Sanhedrin, launched into the life of Moses from his birth, to his exile, to his encounter with God at the burning bush. He spoke about how Moses led the people of God out of Egyptian slavery through forty years of tabernacle (tent) worship in the wilderness of freedom. Then, in verse 47, Stephen jumped another five hundred years to when the first temple was built by Solomon in Jerusalem.

Recollect that Stephen was being accused in Acts 6:13-14 of "speaking against this holy place (the temple) and against the law (the first five books of the Old Testament)." In Acts 7 he covered both topics, ending with the construction of the temple which was built by Solomon a thousand years earlier, destroyed by the Babylonians, then rebuilt by the Jews five hundred years after Solomon. The temple represented everything to the Jewish authorities, priests, and people. They saw it as the very place where God dwelled.

That's why Stephen's next statement got him into so much trouble. He said, "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (v. 48). He then quoted Isaiah 66:1 where God said that His true home is heaven and the entire earth and everything in it is His footstool. It probably didn't help Stephen that he called the religious authorities stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears who always resist the Holy Spirit!

We know that Stephen is right, don't we? While your church building and sanctuary are places where you offer sacred worship to a holy God, they are still just buildings. God is in heaven, far above church properties and the earth itself. But here is what is amazing. Through His Holy Spirit, God had chosen to dwell in all who follow Jesus! Invite Him to come into your life today!

## Poem

Try To Remember

*Come on a journey  
A journey with me  
Back through our hist'ry  
Our hist'ry to see  
Try to remember  
The covenant true  
Try to remember  
God's promise to you  
Think about Abraham  
Moses, the Psalms  
Think about David  
The prophets, our songs  
Try to remember  
Before memory's lost  
Try to remember  
Messiah's great cost  
Open your ears now  
And listen to me  
Open your eyes  
And Anointed One see  
Try to remember  
God's covenant true  
Try to remember  
Atonement for you  
If hearts will be softened  
If repentance you seek  
You'll embrace this Good New  
Which the Spirit doth speak*



**3/3/2023  
WEEK 8 DAY 5**

**Stephen is  
Stoned by the  
Sanhedrin**

**Read Acts 7:54-60**

## *Devotional*

Stephen's little sermon on what we know as the Old Testament didn't set well with the seventy scholars of Scripture that made up the Sanhedrin. So they killed him. Stephen became the first martyr of the Christian faith. He would not be the last.

Take some time to go to [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com) which will take you to the homepage of The Voice of the Martyrs. Navigate to the "Global Prayer Guide" page and use the interactive map to learn about persecution of Christians in the world today. Choose a country and read about what is going on, scrolling down to the prayer requests. Pick a few and spend time in prayer.

## *Poem*

Stony Hearts

*Stony hearts clench stones in hand  
Blood of martyrs soak the land  
Still the Gospel fire is fanned  
Stony hearts clench stones in hand*

*Striking words grip whips in hand  
Blood of martyrs drench the land  
Faith house built not on the sand  
Striking words grip whips in hand*

*Choking lies knot noose in hand  
String saint up above the land  
Hatred lynching, Hate's demand  
Choking lies knot noose in hand*

*Folded hands, saints bowed in prayer  
Blood of martyrs, perfumed air  
Incense rising, throne room chair  
Folded hand, saints bowed in prayer*

*Mighty Warrior, Prince of Peace  
When will all the suffering cease?  
Vict'ry waiting to release  
Mighty Warrior, Prince of Peace*







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